



Center for Mental Health Services

2001 Exemplary Program Awards

PATH Program of Essex County
East Orange, NJ

In 2001, the Center for Mental Health Services' Homeless Programs Branch recognized six programs for their contributions to ending homelessness among people with serious mental illnesses or co-occurring disorders. An independent review panel representing consumers, local service providers and state PATH contacts selected awardees from among many highly qualified nominees. The Exemplary Program Award winners are honored for their commitment to positive client outcomes, collaboration with other agencies, consumer involvement and provision of culturally sensitive services.

Serving an urban county of more than 15 cities (including Newark, Orange, and East Orange), the PATH Program provides comprehensive mental health and housing services through its collaborative work with other community programs. Last year, the PATH Program of Essex County received \$172,019 in PATH funds to serve people who are homeless and have mental illnesses.

According to senior case manager Susan Goodwin, the five PATH outreach and case management staff members have individual strengths and specialties, but the focus is on teamwork. "The team comes together as one to cover every aspect of an individual's needs," says Goodwin, adding that staff is "determined to make a difference." It is this determination and sense of teamwork that led Goodwin to nominate the PATH Program of Essex County as a CMHS Homeless Programs Branch Exemplary Program for 2001.

Outreach

The team's outreach workers approach people in shelters, on the streets, or in tenuous living situations where they are at high risk for becoming homeless. If the team determines that someone does not have a mental illness or co-occurring substance use disorder, they are referred to agencies that can help them with housing, food, and



Outreach workers have the flexibility to offer groceries to program participants when food pantries have run out.

medical/dental services. Supportive counseling is provided to all. For those who become enrolled in the program, the focus is on permanent affordable housing. Last year, PATH Program outreach workers assisted 357 individuals, 56 of whom became enrolled as program participants.

Mental Health and Housing Services

Once enrolled, individuals can choose where they want to go for mental health services. Some choose the PATH Program's home base in East Orange General Hospital,

while others select from among the area's several community mental health centers. The PATH team works closely with each person to determine his or her needs prior to making mental health recommendations and referrals. Many program participants use East Orange General Hospital's Behavioral Health Care Unit, which offers both inpatient and outpatient care. If an individual is hospitalized before or after becoming a PATH Program participant, staff members make regular visits to ensure that they are receiving appropriate treatment and to help them make the critical transition to other services upon discharge.

Housing available to program participants ranges from scattered-site apartments to supervised living. Collaborative teamwork with community programs is instrumental

in helping people find permanent housing. The PATH team works closely with area landlords and realty agencies to assure that services are continuous. Case management services are available to participants until connections with housing and mental health services are firmly established and the individual feels comfortable with the new arrangements. Last year, the program placed 40 people in housing. The PATH Program is working on a new project, NEXT STEP, that will

“The team comes together as one to cover every aspect of an individual’s needs”

—Senior case manager,
Susan Goodman

expand temporary and permanent housing options to assure that more people have safe, affordable housing.

Service Collaboration

Collaboration and teamwork extend far beyond the PATH Program. Sharing information about services available in the community with staff from other agencies is a priority that helps staff better serve program participants by learning where the gaps in services are and how they might expand their services to fill them. Staff members attend monthly meetings with numerous community agencies, including the Homeless Task Force Committee of Newark Emergency Services, the Comprehensive Emergency Assistance Subcommittee in the Division of Community Action, the Essex County Department of Citizen Services, and the Essex County Probation Department. The PATH team also works closely with the probation department to find housing and jobs for people with mental illnesses who are being released from jail.

Consumer and Family Involvement

The PATH Program is a member of the Essex County Mental Health Advisory Board of East Orange General Hospital. The board consists of program participants, their families, and community representatives from various agencies such as the Mental Health Association, Prospect House, and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. Attendance by program participants and family members provides them with an opportunity to voice concerns, and assures that the board learns first-hand about their needs. The board offers recommendations on treatment issues and community services, discusses changes in current services, and develops plans for new programs. In addition, surveys of people who receive services from any of the hospital’s programs are regularly conducted as part of a hospital-wide Performance Improvement Taskforce. These surveys are repeated at six-month and one-year intervals to track recommended improvements.

Cultural Competence

Goodwin notes that at the present time the PATH Program team is staffed entirely by people of color. To serve its diverse population, PATH Program staff members, as well as all members of East Orange General Hospital, are mandated to participate in educational workshops and seminars that address age, gender, and racial/ethnic diversities. These workshops and seminars help provide staff with new techniques and ideas to better serve program participants.

For more information about the Essex County PATH Program, contact Susan Goodwin at (973) 395-4164.

The Homeless Programs Branch of the Center for Mental Health Services is a component of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, one of eight Public Health Service Agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Homeless Programs Branch administers the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program. The PATH program helps homeless people with mental illnesses and co-occurring substance use disorders secure shelter, housing, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and other support services. Last year, more than 400 Path-funded community service providers through the U.S. assisted over 64,000 homeless people with mental illnesses. For more information on the Homeless Programs Branch or the PATH program, call Dr. Frances Randolph at (301) 443-3706.
